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Richard Siken

THE TORN-UP ROAD

1.

There is no way to make this story interesting.

A pause, a road, the taste of gravel in the mouth. The little rocks dig into my skin
like arrowheads.

And then the sense of being smothered underneath a large sack of lentils
or potatoes, or of a boat at night slamming into the dock again
without navigation, without consideration,
heedless of the planks of wood that are the dock,
that make up the berth itself.

The boy will not get up.

And, strangely, I am trying to spell both of our names at once.

2.

I want to tell you this story without having to confess anything,
without having to say that I ran out into the street to prove something,
that he didn't love me,
that I wanted to be possessed, thrown over, that I wanted to have the wounds
nailed shut.

I want to tell you this story without having to be in it:

Max in the wrong clothes. Max at the party, drunk again.

Max in the kitchen, in refrigerator light, his hands around the neck of a beer.

Tell me we're dead and I'll love you even more.

I'm surprised that I say it with feeling.

There's a thing in my stomach about this. A simple thing. The last rung.

3.

Can you see them there, by the side of the road,
not moving, not wrestling,
making a circle out of the space between the circles? Can you see them
pressed into the gravel, pressed into the dirt,

pressing against each other in an effort to make the minutes stop, to slow them down,

headlights shining in all directions, night spilling over them like gasoline in all directions, and the dark blue

over everything, and them holding their breath—

There is no way to make this story interesting.

4.

I want to tell you this story without having to say that I ran out into the street to prove something, but he chased after me

and threw me into the gravel.

And he knew it wasn't going to be okay, and he told me

it wasn't going to be okay.

And he wouldn't kiss me, but he covered my body with his body

and held me down until I promised not to run back out into the street again.

But the minutes don't stop, the prayer of going nowhere

going nowhere.

5.

His shoulder blots out the stars but the minutes don't stop. He covers my body with his body but the minutes

don't stop.

The smell of him mixed with asphalt, creosote, oil, exhaust.

The weight of him pushing down against my breathing,

making it shallow, but the minutes don't stop.

There, on the ground, slipping through the minutes, trying to notch them—

Like taking the same picture over and over, the spaces in between sealed up—

Knocked hard enough to make the record skip and change its music, setting the melody on its forward course again, circling and recircling the center hole in the flat black disk.

And words, little words, not really

soothing but soothing nonetheless.

Words too small for any hope or promise.

6.

I thought that you might help me get to Heaven in this road movie where
we don't go anywhere.

So I have feelings. So I have them for you.

So I didn't think you'd try to stop me.

7.

I can see myself up ahead, in the distance, by the side of the road.

I'm spitting up blood again. I'm spitting up blood.

You stand outside the film and don't include yourself in the picture.

O velocity, not all of us love the feeling as the car zooms off.

And velocity, not all of us are bracing ourselves for impact.